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NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0058
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0251
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001593

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/24

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Human Rights Activists and Religious Figures
Continue to Face Pressure

REF: 09 TASHKENT 1585; 09 TASHKENT 1573; 09 TASHKENT 1604

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REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1) (C) Summary: Human rights activists and religious figures have reported more frequent harassment and intimidation from law enforcement over the last two months. Rights activists attribute this increase to attempts by government officials at various levels to quiet "independent voices" prior to the December 27 parliamentary elections. End summary.

Reports from Human Rights Activists

2) (C) Vasila Inoyatova, Chairperson for the Ezgulik human rights organization in Uzbekistan, and Sukhrobjon Ismoilov, human rights analyst with the Rapid Response Group (RRG), met with poloff on November 18 to discuss what they perceive as a recent crackdown against human rights activists. Both reported that the harassment of human rights activists is increasing in the run-up to parliamentary elections, scheduled for December 27. Inoyatova pointed out that this was not unexpected, as the government has a history of using repressive tactics before most major elections since independence. These activists discussed the following cases:

3) (C) Events Surrounding Bahadir Choriev: On November 11, police went to the homes of four activists in Jizzakh, and two of them were beaten later in the day after they tried to meet with returned political opposition figure Bahadir Choriev. (See Ref A.) Choriev had tried to meet with activists in the Ferghana Valley, as well, but police called on the activists and forbade them from doing so. (Note: Both Inoyatova and Ismoilov expressed concerns about Choriev's activities. Choriev espouses nonviolent resistance, and has called for mass actions in the past such as everyone wearing white to recognize the anniversary of the 2005 Andijon events. He has also floated ideas such as staging a march from Kashkadarya to Tashkent to protest government activities. Although he does not yet have a large following, the GOU is

obviously watching him closely. Inoyatova stated that although she respects Choriev's decision to return to Uzbekistan, she believes his tactics are not suitable for Uzbekistan, and may even be dangerous for the public. "You can't forget Andijon," she said. End note.)

4) (C) Bobomurod Razzoqov: Razzoqov is Ezgulik's Regional Chairman in Bukhara, and has been active in standing up for farmers' rights. Without notification to Razzoqov of any charges, a district court recently found him guilty of administrative code violations and fined him 335,450 soum (about 225 USD), for using village land without permission. Inoyatova reported that law enforcement warned Razzoqov several days before the conviction that he should stop his human rights activities and stop talking to foreign journalists.

5) (C) Ganikhon Mamatkhanov: Mamatkhanov is a member of the Independent Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, and has been active on farmers' rights issues in the Ferghana Valley. On October 9, an unknown man approached Mamatkhanov and put something into his bag. Police approached him immediately and found 500,000 Uzbek soum

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(about 330 USD) in his bag. Based on this evidence and the allegations of two farmers (one of whom Mamatkhanov claims he has never met), Mamatkhanov was arrested on October 12 on charges of fraud and bribery. He faces up to 10 years in prison for each charge. His trial started November 17 in Ferghana City, and although several human rights activists tried to attend in a show of support, they were not allowed to attend.

6) (SBU) Abdusalom Ergashev: Ergashev is a member of the RRG analytical group, and is another well-known activist in Ferghana Valley who has been facing increased attention from law enforcement. Ergashev was with Mamatkhanov when the money was placed in his bag, and suspects that there have been attempts to set him up for trouble, as well. At the beginning of November, two construction workers who had worked on Ergashev's house last year told him that they were approached and encouraged to meet with the local Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) office to talk about Ergashev. They did not do so. On November 11, Ergashev received a phone call from an unknown caller asking him to come to the train station to pick up a package. When he questioned the caller about his identities and other details, the caller hung up. On November 13, the Chairperson of Ergashev's Mahalla Committee (neighborhood administrative unit) informed Ergashev that her supervisor from the MIA demanded that she write a character profile on Ergashev. When she wrote about Ergashev's positive characteristics, the MIA official told her to rewrite it with a negative assessment. She refused to do so.

Reports from Religious Figures

7) (C) Dmitry Pitirimov, the director of the "Joy" Baptist Summer Camp recently fined for teaching religion to minors and tax evasion (see Ref B), reported that on the night of November 11, he and his family spent a night away from home, visiting his daughter. When they returned home, it was clear that someone had been there. No money or valuables were taken, but cabinets and boxes were dumped out as if searched, the gas valve on the oven was open, and a folder with documents related to Pitirimov's business was dumped on the balcony and wet with kerosene. Other things were disturbed as well: a thick pile of wet newspapers was in the sink, dust from a garbage can was spread all over kitchen cabinets, buttons were torn from a jacket and the jacket shoved behind a toilet bowl tank; Christian wall calendars were thrown in a toilet. When Pitirimov

called the police and said he believed the action to be related to his recent trial, police accused him of staging the disturbance himself. After completing the paperwork with police, he and his family returned to his daughter's home.

8) (C) Igor Morozov, the local representative for the Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan, reported on November 18 that a district court convicted him of teaching religion illegally and fined him 3,364,500 soum (about 2,200 USD). Morozov filed the paperwork last year to register a local group of Jehovah's Witnesses, but the application was denied. He believes that authorities charged and convicted him in an effort to prevent him from pursuing legal status for the Tashkent congregation.

9) (C) Inoyatova also reported an increase in the number of cases against people seen as falling outside of the religious mainstream, particularly those whom authorities consider part of "Nur," the Turkish-based Muslim organization for followers of Said

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Nursi. Inoyatova and Ismoilov agreed that Nur seems to have no actual organized presence or leadership here, but it is the current label authorities give to those they charge with religious extremism. Ismoilov reported that authorities have begun arresting members of an alleged new group given the name "Birodarlar" ("Brothers") in Surhandaryo Province, but he questions whether an actual "group" really exists. When asked whether she sees this clampdown on both Muslim and Protestant groups as part of the repression related to the upcoming elections, Inoyatova replied, "Of course. They want to silence any independent voice."

Comment

10) (C) Reports that a clampdown against human rights activists is underway track with what Post has been observing, and the upcoming elections may well be the cause. Religious figures have been unable to come up with a concrete reason for the increased problems they have been experiencing, but the elections are a possible explanation for that, as well. The GOU has taken very little overt action regarding the upcoming elections - with no visible signs of a "campaign," other than in the artificial, state-controlled press. This clampdown against activists suggests, however, that the GOU takes the elections and the potential for unrest surrounding them very seriously. Some incidents (such as in Jizzakh) may be the work of zealous local officials. If raised in the right way, these cases may be looked into by the central authorities, who claim to be interested in addressing instances of abuse. But the GOU's harsh posture toward perceived systemic challenges will require longer-term approaches, which could be fleshed out as the Annual Bilateral Consultation process unfolds.
End comment.
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